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Thumbnail Sketches



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Thumbnail Sketches

Published in 1927—the year of the
Diamond Jubilee Celebration
of Canada's Confederation

by

The Robert Simpson Company
Limited

TORONTO

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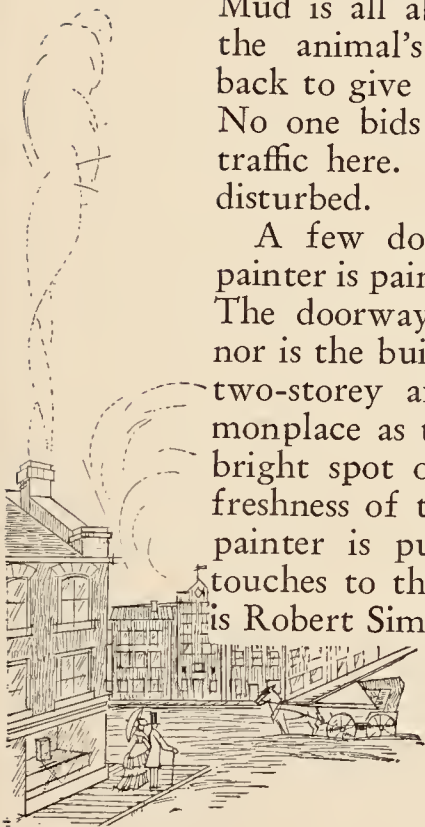
“Thumbnail Sketches”



HE intersection is Queen and Yonge Streets. A little, gray mare is floundering helplessly in the mud. Two, mildly-interested spectators are the only ones who view its struggles. Other horses have floundered here before.

The driver, too, seems helpless. Mud is all about him. He halts the animal's exertions and sits back to give it a well-earned rest. No one bids him move on. No traffic here. He sits calmly, undisturbed.

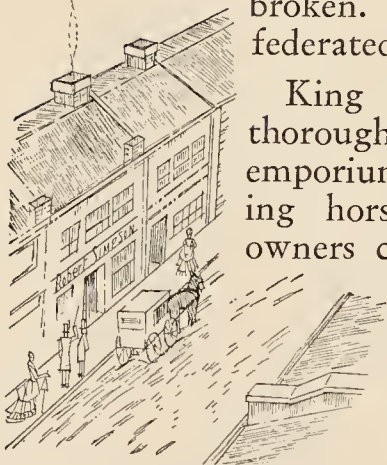
A few doors to the north, a painter is painting a doorway sign. The doorway is not pretentious, nor is the building. It is a lowly, two-storey affair, quite as commonplace as those about it. The bright spot of its exterior is the freshness of the new paint. The painter is putting the finishing touches to the name. The name is Robert Simpson.



This is the newly-heralded dry goods establishment of Mr. Robert Simpson, formerly of Newmarket. The city is Toronto, not yet having outlived its early sobriquet of "Muddy York". Its boundaries are Toronto Bay on the south, Dufferin Street on the west, Bloor Street on the north, the Don River on the east except for a narrow strip along the lake-front running further out to McLean Avenue. Its population is 56,092. In short, this is the year 1871.

Just four years since the Fathers of Confederation welded Canada into a young commonwealth. The West is just acquired; its virgin prairies hardly broken. Canada is in its confederated infancy.

King Street is the main thoroughfare. The great trade emporiums are there; the spanking horses, their socially elect owners come to shop. Bonnets,



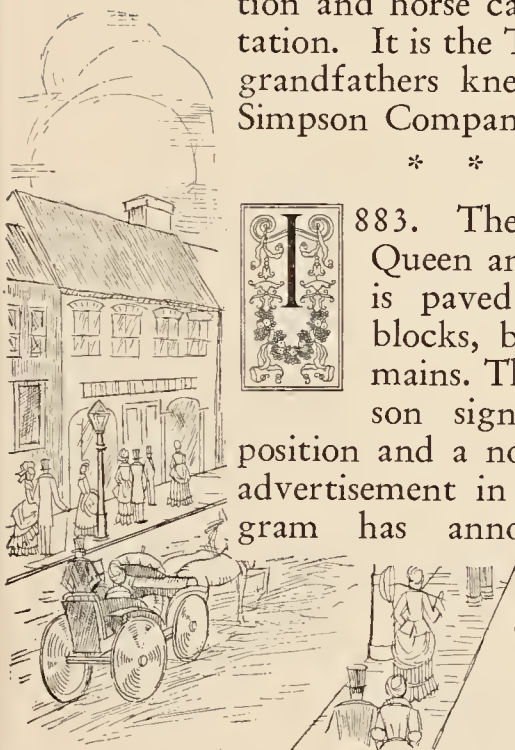
basques and bustles are prominent in the throng. It is the hour of "doing King", when the well-to-do folks parade a marked-off section of the street to pay homage to Fashion and her sister, Society. King Street is a grand street—much grander than its neighbor, Yonge Street, where only the modest, business men's shops are.

This is the era of panoramas and popular lectures in amusements; of gas for street illumination and horse cars for transportation. It is the Toronto that our grandfathers knew; The Robert Simpson Company at its origin.

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883. The Intersection of Queen and Yonge Streets is paved with cedar blocks, but the mud remains. The Robert Simpson sign is in a new position and a novel, eleven-inch advertisement in the day's Telegram has announced "Lively

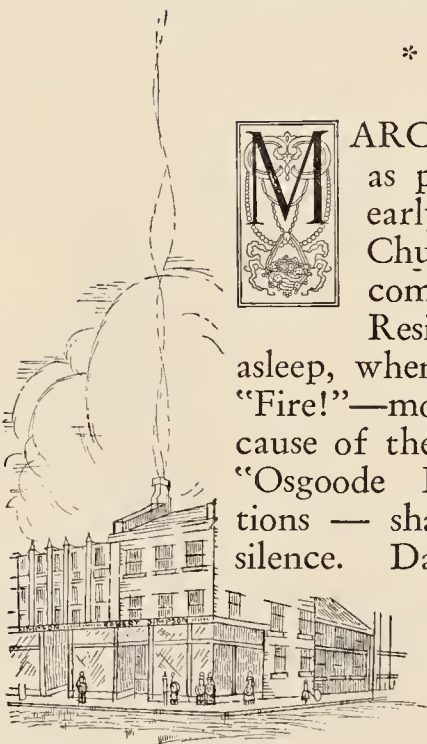


Times at the South-West Corner of Queen and Yonge". The store now boasts thirteen clerks, a horse and delivery cart and a large, plate-glass front with highly-modern, V-shaped entrance. The high quality of its merchandise, the courteous, efficient service, has diverted not a few of the fashionable carriages to this growing Yonge Street. Canada has moved forward with the vigorous strides of youth; the establishment of Robert Simpson with it. The future is immensely promising.

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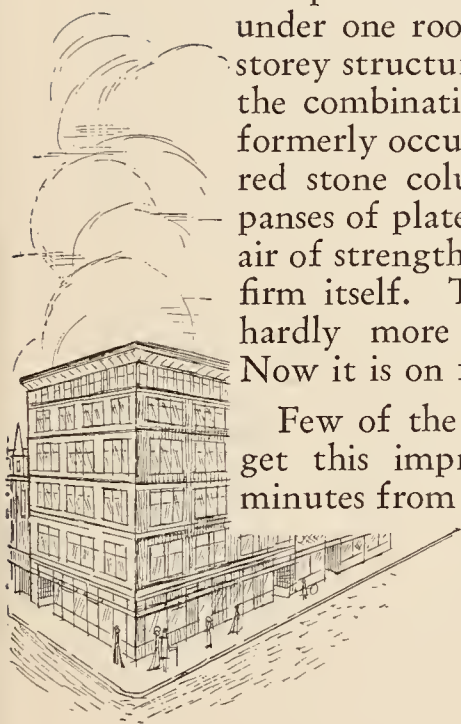
ARCH the 3rd, 1895 is as peaceful as any other early Sunday morning. Church bells have not yet commenced to chime. Residential Toronto is asleep, when the dreaded cry of "Fire!"—more dreadful now because of the recent "Globe" and "Osgoode Building" conflagrations — shatters the peaceful silence. Dazed citizens tumble



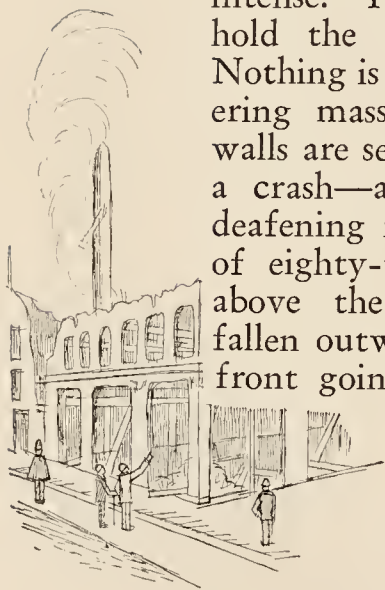
from comfortable beds; nervous mothers seek to calm frightened children, and Toronto pours out to witness one of the most spectacular fires in its history—that of The Robert Simpson Department Store.

In the interim since 1883, the Simpson business has prospered. Reluctantly at first, but later with that unbounded enthusiasm that characterized him, Mr. Simpson had developed his business into a great departmental store where all purchases could be made under one roof. A spacious, six-storey structure stands in place of the combination of old buildings formerly occupied—its handsome, red stone columns and wide expanses of plate glass lending it the air of strength and stability of the firm itself. The new building is hardly more than a year old. Now it is on fire.

Few of the spectators will forget this impressive blaze. Five minutes from the discovery of the



fire, the vast and handsome building with its valuable stock is a mass of flames that crack the immense plate glass windows and pour forth with a fury that gives no hope of saving the finest structure of its kind in Canada. Soon the entire six floors are burned through. They crumble to the basement. Nothing is left but steel girders and brick walls, their windows gaping. One can see the massive steel girders that but a few minutes before had supported the floors and among which now, the flames from the debris below rise in scorching columns to the sixth floor and above. The heat is intense. The girders that serve to hold the walls together, warp. Nothing is left to steady the towering masses of masonry. The walls are seen to totter. There is a crash—another crash—then a deafening roar like the discharge of eighty-ton guns. The walls above the second storey have fallen outward, the Yonge Street front going out compactly into

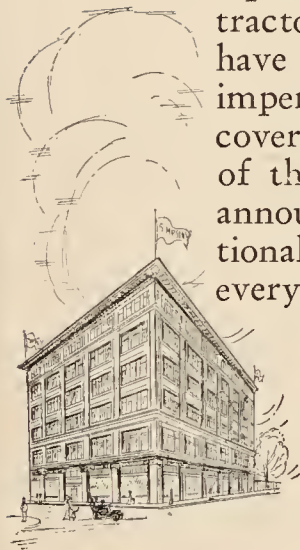


the street. The roadway is completely covered from one side to the other with a mass of brick and twisted iron several feet deep. Nothing is left but four, gaunt walls; a mass of smouldering debris. The stately structure of Robert Simpson has vanished.

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THE Demon Fire has been cheated. A new building stands where the old had burnt. It is more impressive and it covers the entire Simpson property. "Gigantic", the papers term it. In architectural style, it is an exact replica of the original. The contractors, profiting by experience, have rendered the frame work impervious to intense heat by coverings of concrete. The papers of this day, January 18th, 1896, announce "Home Again, a National Event". "Simpson's is in every detail the most modern



store in Canada with its thirty-five departments, a most complete service, a well-organized mail order department and a lunch room on the first floor," they declare.

This day is indeed a happy one for Mr. Robert Simpson. Past the prime of life when the disaster overtook him, he resolutely refused to retire. Within five days, a temporary store had borne the name of Robert Simpson in a lower section of Yonge Street. Business was carried on and today, Mr. Simpson sees the task of rebuilding on a larger scale completed. With the new structure the firm is known as The Robert Simpson Company, Limited.

* * * *



THE Twentieth Century Belongs to Canada." Men on every hand repeat it; they thrill with a consciousness of national greatness at the dawning. No country finds a more enter-



prising group of men eager to push forward commercial growth, to pioneer to greatness.

It is such a group as this, including Mr. Harris H. Fudger, Mr. J. W. (now Sir Joseph) Flavelle and Mr. A. E. Ames, with which, this day, March 1st, 1898, rests the destinies of The Robert Simpson Company, Limited.

On December the 14th, 1897, Mr. Robert Simpson had passed away, leaving a record of achievement that few have excelled. The success that he had won, the esteem of his qualities of heart as well as of head, his deeds of charity, his kindly bearing towards customers, left a sad note of regret in many a heart. The Robert Simpson Company, Limited, remains a fitting monument to his memory.

Considerable speculation had followed. A United States organization had opened negotiations with the Robert Simpson Estate and for a time it had been feared



that this great Canadian institution would become a branch of one of the large New York or Chicago houses.

The old flag remains flying. This day, Canadian enterprise and Canadian finance have taken up the torch of achievement so ably carried by Mr. Robert Simpson. An aggressive expansion program is already being planned.

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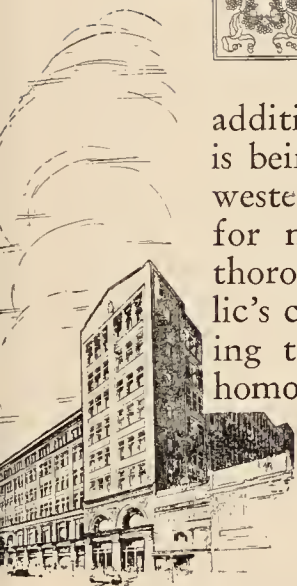
1908 is far removed from 1820. For almost a century, Knox Church has stood a monument of Canadian Presbyterianism. To-day, this landmark is going. With it into memory are also passing the venerable Richmond Street livery stables, the old morgue, the small shops and adjacent Chinese restaurants. A new era has come. The Robert Simpson Company is expanding.

When construction is completed, the long-sought goal will have been reached. Simpson's will then occupy an entire city block of uniform height and design. The unfailing reward of high quality merchandise and unstinted service to the public is being reaped.

* * * *



923. Every available foot of ground is now being pressed into use to accommodate this great, Canadian merchandising establishment. A new addition, eight storeys in height, is being built on the space at the western end of the store—that has for many years been a private thoroughfare placed at the public's convenience. The new building towers above the old, yet is homogeneous.

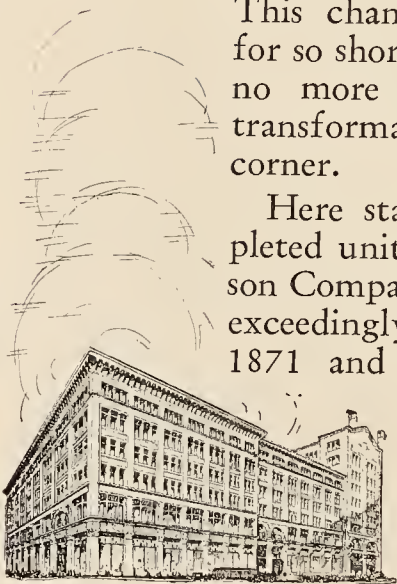




FROM little acorns do mighty oaks grow. The painter who, in 1871, so carefully fashioned the sign of Robert Simpson, would to-day stand aghast at the Aladdin-like growth of the establishment. Nor would the man in that buggy recognize his surroundings. A dream—a fantasy—the years have truly seen Toronto move on.

In 1927, we can pause and look about us at what these years have done. Toronto is a city, well over the half million mark. Queen and Yonge Streets is one of the busiest intersections in Canada. This change is truly marvelous for so short a space of time. But no more remarkable than the transformation of its south-west corner.

Here stands the present completed unit of The Robert Simpson Company, Limited. From an exceedingly small floor space in 1871 and an equally negligible



trade, the establishment of the Toronto store alone, covers nearly thirteen acres of floor space and its sales rise to many millions. As a background, there is a nationwide mail order organization with branches at Toronto, Halifax and Regina. Such an outstanding success could only have come from true service to the public; from faithful value and high standard of quality in its merchandise.

* * * *



OUR thumbnail sketches are complete. On the eve of Sixty Years since the Confederation of our beloved Canada, and fifty-seven since the inception of The Robert Simpson Company, Limited, we proudly point to the unparalleled development of Canadian enterprise and to Canada's position amongst the nations of to-day; to the corresponding growth of an outstanding Canadian merchandise organization, The Robert Simpson Company, Limited.

Jubilee Year,

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The
Robert Simpson Company
Limited

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Robert Simpson Company
Limited

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Simpsons, Limited.
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